

COMPOSITION DAY RECORDER RECITAL:

“The Incredible Shrinking Recorder”

The Performance Space, Thursday, August 29, 1996, 4.30 pm.

Ian Shanahan - recorders

Diana Blom - piano

1. Martin Wesley-Smith (arr. Ian Shanahan): *For Bass Recorder and Tape* (1983/1988), for amplified bass recorder and tape.

This piece was originally going to be for tape. In trying to get the hang of the portamento controls in Music Composition Language on a Fairlight Computer Musical Instrument, I had composed a short sequence that, when finished, was too attractive to throw away. I added a bit more to it, then some more ... till soon a fully-fledged piece was under way. One of the parts seemed to be taking on a solo role, and seemed vaguely clarinetish, so I started fleshing it out as a line that a clarinetist could play live. But before it was finished, percussionist Graeme Leak heard it and claimed it for marimba. Thus *For Marimba and Tape* was born. Later I turned it back into *For Clarinet and Tape*, which became *For Bass Clarinet and Tape* when Dutch bass-clarinetist Harry Sparnaay started blowing it. (The tape was ‘re-orchestrated’, with clarinetish sounds replacing marimbaish ones.) Ian Shanahan adapted the present version of it for his bass recorder; a lady in Paris toots it on alto sax; and one in America saws through it on viola. As someone said about Quantz’s flute concerti: “Not three hundred pieces but the same piece three hundred times”!

I can find nothing to say about the music of the piece except that it was composed purely intuitively over a period of about eighteen months - in other words, there was no consciously applied grand technical scheme controlling its composition. The tape part was prepared on a Fairlight CMI Series Iix in the Electronic Music Studio of The New South Wales State Conservatorium of Music in Sydney.

M.W-S.

2. Ros Bandt: *Meditation* (1976), for tenor recorder.

Ros Bandt is a Melbourne-based composer, recorder player, and sound sculptor. She seems to be preoccupied with spiritual and meditative aspects of music, and so inclines towards Eastern/New Age aesthetics and styles in her compositions and improvisations. In particular, the influences of Zen Buddhism via the *shakuhachi* (a Japanese endblown bamboo flute, regarded as a ‘meditative tool’ in the practice of Zen) are to be found in *Meditation*; indeed, this piece is scored for *shakuhachi*, (Western transverse) flute, or alto recorder. (Yet I prefer to play *Meditation* on tenor recorder instead, for it seems to evoke the sound of the *shakuhachi* better than the alto recorder.) Bandt’s score is rather skeletal; she encourages a freer, more improvisatory approach than is permitted in the music of many modern composers. The performer may therefore elaborate and ornament the piece, making its surface quite intricate by injecting various contemporary recorder playing techniques - in keeping of course with the spirit and technique of the *shakuhachi*. Consequently, I never rehearse *Meditation*!

I.S.

3. Ian Shanahan: *Helical Ribbon* (1990), for alto recorder.

Helical Ribbon is respectfully dedicated to Warren Burt. It was written specifically for the occasion of him being presented with a Sounds Australian Award in April 1990. His prize was my original manuscript - and the première performance - of the piece, a pithy, rather challenging technical study for adventurous recorder players who wish to become acquainted with the vast multiphonic capabilities of the alto recorder. In accordance with Warren’s composerly and

philosophical predilections, there are references to funk and microtonality. The piece is almost entirely comprised of a unique set of microtonal structures: 22 multiphonics (the number of which also flags his entry within the book *22 Australian Composers*). The title? Mirroring Warren's application of scientific paradigms to his music, "Helical" alludes to the double spiral of the desoxyribonucleic acid [DNA] molecule, human life's building-block, whereas "Ribbon" is a metaphor for the vertical dimensionality of the recorder's multiphonic sound-world (as opposed to the linear, unidimensional, melodic nature of its traditional acoustic output).

I.S.

4. Ian Shanahan: *Lingua Silens Florum* (1991), for prepared alto recorder.

"It is said that the Buddha once gave a sermon without saying a word;
he merely held up a flower to his listeners.
This was the famous 'Flower Sermon',
a sermon in the language of patterns,
the *silent language of flowers*."

György Doczi, *The Power of Limits*, p.1.

This very brief and gentle work (in which the recorder is 'prepared' by blocking the instrument's endhole with Blutac) is dedicated to Dr Eric Gross, upon his retirement from the position of Associate Professor in the Department of Music at the University of Sydney. It was premiered at his Farewell Concert, as the first of a number of short 'garlands' in a Festschrift offered to the esteemed professor. Besides being just an exercise in breath and articulatory control, one hopes that the subtle floral patterning of the music transcends mundanity, and captures something of the essence of the man.

I.S.

5. Dulcie Holland: *Lullay, my tiny child* (1974), for soprano recorder and keyboard.

It might not be well known that, as an adjunct to her composerly and educative rôles, Dulcie Holland is quite an accomplished recorder player; indeed, this is probably the impetus behind her significant contribution to the modern Australian recorder repertoire in works such as the *Sonata* of 1962, *Starlight* (also for soprano recorder and keyboard), and *Doves Around* for recorder sextet.

Lullay, my tiny child, composed for The Epstein Duo, is a simple, direct, and utterly charming waltz-like vignette - in 3/4 time throughout, "gently rocking" ... nothing more need be said.

I.S.

6. Nigel Butterley: *The White-Throated Warbler* (1965), for sopranino recorder and harpsichord (or piano).

The White-Throated Warbler, well-known to recorder aficionados through David Munrow's performance of it on the *Art of the Recorder* LP set, has by now been inducted into that small but privileged group of modern recorder works which are 'standard repertoire'. Composed for the distinctive ensemble of sopranino recorder and harpsichord, *The White-Throated Warbler* was premiered by an English duo, Carl Dolmetsch - son of the man responsible for the recorder's 20th-century revival - and Joseph Saxby, in Sydney, on February 27, 1965.

The sopranino recorder in particular has enjoyed a long historical custom of iconic association with birdsong, either in the musical imitation or evocation of it, or in the actual training of birds to sing: mad George III of England is reputed to have so employed the instrument; there is a body of 18th-century repertoire - *The Bird Fancyer's Delight* - which was composed explicitly for this purpose; and one etymological theory claims that the Latin root of the instrument's name, *recordare*, is connected with instruction in birdsong. At any rate, an ornithological link has perpetuated right through to the present day in recorder composition, and Butterley's work belongs firmly to this tradition: *The White-Throated Warbler* (which, despite its serial compositional logic,

is both melodically and harmonically quite mellifluous), is intended to imitate the cry of a native Australian bird that lived within earshot of the composer's home, then in the leafy Sydney suburb of Beecroft. Moreover, Butterley was inspired to compose *The White-Throated Warbler* for Dolmetsch and Saxby after hearing Saxby's rendition of a solo harpsichord work by Couperin (similarly with allusions to birdsong), *The Nightingale in Love*. Butterley, however, in an air of pragmatism notes on the front of his published score that a piano may be used instead of a harpsichord should the latter be unavailable - as is the case today.

I.S.

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